

An interview with Ralph Siddoway, September 1984, at his home, 673 North Vernal Avenue, Vernal, Utah.

Interviewer: Elizabeth Sowards, Uintah County Historian

Elizabeth Sowards (ES): First of all, I would just like to talk a minute about your dad. I see his name in the paper a lot around the early 1900s. It seems like he was on a lot of boards and he was active in so many things. I just thought maybe, as his son, you could tell me what you remember about him. Tell me first what he looked like, as you can remember, and just some of the things that you remember about him.

Ralph Siddoway: Well, he was a medium-sized man. He wasn't particularly tall, or extra broad either. He was just kind of a medium-sized man. The last twenty years, he kind of walked with a stoop, because a tree fell on him and broken his back.

ES: When did that happen?

Ralph: It was in 1929. Back in the early 1900s, like you say, he was real active. He was on the [LDS] High Council. He was on the School Board. Both of those for long periods of time, I think about twenty years apiece. He was a county commissioner and then he was a director or president of eight different little businesses. When they needed some service back in those days, they didn't have any government to go cry to, so they all got together and raised enough money to start the service they wanted. That was the way they got the power company. He was president of the power company.

Then they needed a flour mill and he was president of the flour mill. They did have the Bank of Vernal. I think the Bank of Vernal started about 1906, but the Bank of Vernal became dominated by Mr. [N.J.] Meagher, who was a Catholic. Mr. Meagher didn't start the Bank of Vernal. He was only hired.

ES: I remember that.

Ralph: He didn't pay any money in to start with, he was just hired there. But he set the policy, and he and my dad didn't get along right from the very first. Dad went to him for a loan for the power company, and Mr. Meagher would give him the loan, but the restrictions on it were such that Dad wouldn't accept it. S.R. Bennion was the big financier for the church people from the very beginning. S.R. Bennion was president of the Bank of Vernal, and it was kind of a peculiar thing. Mr. Bennion made the loan to the power company to Dad, but the Bank of Vernal wouldn't.

ES: A personal loan?

Ralph: No, it was made to the power company. It was a little corporation.

ES: Did Bennion make it through the bank, or did he loan it to them?

Ralph: No, he loaned it of his own money. He was quite a wealthy man, quite an entrepreneur. Back in those days, I think S.R. Bennion had more to do with financing than any other man. He and Dad were quite good friends and worked quite closely together. Most anything that S.R. Bennion was in, my dad was in and vice versa. Anyway, S.R. Bennion lent the power company the money, and after that the people could see that they wanted another bank. So, they canvassed the city in one day.

Ed Samuels, this is a family that we have neglected in much of our history, you don't hear much about the Samuels family, yet in early days they were a real active family. Mr. Samuels personally canvassed the town and got promises of stock subscription to insure a bank. So, they got busy and called a meeting and starting subscribing stock. They started the bank in 1910.

It wasn't any time at all until they named it the Uintah State Bank, and it wasn't any time at all until the Uintah State Bank had a lot more business than the Bank of Vernal. They always did have, all through the years, until they sold out. They had more than twice the business, usually three time the business, that the Bank of Vernal picked up.

The Uintah State Bank was organized by all the people of the whole community. In those days, the people of the community that had money and influence were sheepmen. So, the first board of directors that they had were all sheepmen, I think, with the exception of two men. I think J.K. Bullock, who was a merchant, was one of the directors, and Thomas O'Donnell, an attorney, was the other. They were all sheepmen other than those two.

ES: Was Thomas the one that married the doctor, Garrett?

Ralph: Yes, he married Dr. Garrett. That little bank flourished from the time that it was organized until they sold it out to the First Security Bank. In my opinion, the only bad thing that Mr. Cheney did all the time he was here was to sell that bank. Of course, it was limited in its size [meaning] that were limited in the size of loan they could make, but they had ways of doing that, too. If anybody wanted a larger loan than the Uintah State Bank could give them, all they had to do was to go to one of three bank in Salt Lake City, and with the recommendation of the Uintah State Bank, they got the loan, whatever they wanted. So it wasn't really a drawback.

Anyway, Mr. Cheney didn't want to be president anymore, and that is the weakness of that bank. I figure about twelve different men had been on the Board of Directors of the Uintah State Bank from the time it was organized until the time it was sold.

There was only one person ever employed in that bank who was a son or a daughter of a director. So, when it came time to put new stockholders in, and new officers, and new people in it, they didn't have anything, the stockholders. Walter Woolley was the only one, and his father was secretary to the corporation that was organized, and secretary of it until just three, four years before they sold the bank. Walter Woolley was the only one employed that was a son of a director. They all had sons, well-educated people, that could have done it, but it just seemed like there was an unwritten law that the directors would not put their family in the business.

ES: That was bad in some ways because no one would carry it on.

Ralph: But none of Dad's sons could borrow money from the Uintah State Bank! They could find a place to borrow it, if they had to borrow it, but not the Uintah State Bank. When the whole

thing had run its course and all the directors had got old and it was time to turn it over to somebody, they didn't have anyone to turn it over to. The same thing happened to Mr. Cheney.

Mr. Cheney was hired in Salt Lake. He went with the Utah State National Bank. Orvil Adams was one of the foremost bankers in Utah at that time and he had trained Mr. Cheney. Through the connection with the Uintah State Bank and the Utah State National Bank, Orvil Adams recommended Mr. Cheney to come out here and run this bank. Mr. Cheney did exactly the same thing. Mr. Cheney had a son that was old enough to run that bank, fine, vigorous, upright, extremely intelligent individual. He wasn't even let behind the counter.

So, when Mr. Cheney wanted to retire, there was no one to retire to. They did import Mr. Sargent, who took the job over. They put him in as vice-president of the bank, but the people didn't take to Mr. Sargent. He was a city man, and he was bank inspector, and he always saw the customer as somebody that he was examining all the time. He was never a friendly person.

But anyway, when Mr. Cheney got ready to retire, he was in exactly the same position as he was before: he didn't have anyone to turn it to, so he sold this to the stockholders and they had been offered, had several offers to sell the bank at different times. They didn't want to sell it, but when it came down to it, Mr. Cheney wanted out. He had had a heart attack and he was going to quit. They didn't turn it over to Mr. Sargent. They didn't have anybody else ready to take it over, so they just decided to sell it. That's why the First Security Bank got it.

But Dad was on the executive committee as a director. He was a director from the time it was organized until he died. Nobody sold that was director. Nobody sold that ever had anything to do with it. But it was the same with the rest of them, except Mr. Woolley. He had four sons, and one of them worked at the bank.

ES: He did work there a while.

Ralph: He did. By the time Mr. Cheney wanted to get out of it, Mr. Woolley wanted out, too. He was then about sixty-five or sixty-seven, and he wanted to quit, too. So, that's why we got the First Security Bank here.

ES: That's interesting.

Ralph: The same thing happened to these other little companies. The Vogue Company used to run a theater when you first came here, I think.

ES: Yes.

Ralph: Dad was president of that. We sold that to the Vernal Drug largely. Dad was president of the Vernal Drug for a while, and president of Vernal Amusement. They sold the Vernal Amusement stock mostly to the Vernal Drug.

ES: Now, tell me what Vernal Amusement had under it.

Ralph: That was the Vogue Theater. They owned the building where the Vernal Drugstore is [21 E. Main Street]. That's a peculiar thing, too, because they own the building and the rent they get out of it doesn't amount to a dime.

ES: Do the stockholders still own it today?

Ralph: No, Glenn Cooper ended up with majority of the stock, and now Glenn has sold his stock to Harvey and Glade, and they own it. But the old-time originators, like S.D. Colton and my dad, Ed Samuels, the Stringhams, the Hackings, are not represented at all. They're gone.

Those two little businesses, ? and Vernal Milling Company, became so regulated with federal regulations along in the 1930s and 1940s that they just didn't profit to do business in the mill.

ES: Where was the mill located?

Ralph: Up on Fourth North and First East.

ES: Who first ran it?

Ralph: It was a corporation. About the same people owned that as owned the Uintah State Bank.

ES: Who ran it? Who managed it for them?

Ralph: My dad was the president of it and Jimmy Coup was the manager.

ES: What happened to Jimmy? I have never heard of him before.

Ralph: He got miller's asthma when he was about seventy years old and he just smothered to death.

ES: Kind of like emphysema then?

Ralph: Yes, like emphysema, he smothered to death. He made real good flour. Of course, the wheat that you produce by irrigation is soft wheat, and that's all we had here, we didn't have any hard wheat. Hard wheat makes a superior flour to the soft wheat. So, when they started shipping flour in and we got the good roads, most of the people preferred the flour from these large mills.

ES: From outside, and that kind of did the business in? You know, a lot of people say that the Calder boys didn't get along and that's why the Calder Creamery and all of that folded up, but as I look at history, I think it was the transportation, the refrigerated trucks that people could haul in the ice cream and that from Salt Lake and this gave them competition. Don't you think that was part of it?

Ralph: They could haul the milk out, too. They would haul the milk into these big creameries. One big creamery would produce more butter than all of these little creameries we had, Roosevelt, Alterra, Tabiona, scattered all over the Basin.

ES: Don't you think it was a matter of finances, rather than the boys not wanting to keep it going? I think it became unprofitable.

Ralph: Oh, the boys did want to keep it going. Well, you've seen it in your lifetime. When a little service station tries to compete with Standard Oil Company, they don't do it very long.

ES: That's what happened to our business. They just cut out the middleman, so to speak. We have sold it and it's kind of going along, but really, there is just no profit in it anymore because those big companies sell gasoline through their stations cheaper than the jobber can buy it. You just can't make any money.

Ralph: That's an old trick and the creamery knew the trick before the oil companies knew it. Those creameries would pay more for butterfat in Vernal than they would pay for it in Salt Lake and the Calders couldn't compete with it. It wasn't a case of not wanting it. I don't think anybody wanted to save any business more than Howard Calder wanted to save the creamery. He would have just about given his life for it. But you can't do it against those big creameries. They just put you out of business.

ES: I can see that just through looking at history. Can you think back when you were just a little boy starting school, in your really early years, and describe what Vernal looked like? What buildings were here, what Main Street was like. That would be about what year, when you were starting school?

Ralph: Let's see, I was born in 1905, so I started school in 1912. I started when I was seven years old. Of course, we didn't go nine months then either. We went as long as they had money. If we had eight months of school, that was an excellent year.

What it looked like: this was a dirt road right out here.

ES: Vernal Avenue was a dirt road?

Ralph: We lived down in the old house, you know where that it, this side of where the bridge was, where the road ended. There was a fence right across the road. People were allowed to go through Dad's pasture and on over to Ashley, but there was no road. There was no bridge across the creek there.

ES: So, how did they get across the creek?

Ralph: When it was high water, there was bridge up in Maeser, and there was one down, oh, the Heber Powell Bridge.

ES: Oh, so they had to go that far to get around in high water?

Ralph: Then they built that bridge across Ashley when I was, I can remember when they built it, I guess it was maybe around 1910 or 1912, that they built that bridge. It kept washing out every year. Every year it would wash out. But they would build another one. This was a dirt road all the way up, no automobiles, and you either walked or you went with team and buggy, wagon, or you rode a horse.

When you got up as far as First North where the mortuary is now [15 East 100 North], there was a big white house. It looked a lot like it does now even.

ES: It was the McAndrews'?

Ralph: That was the McAndrews' home. It belonged to the old railway company. Where the gas office is [87 North Vernal Avenue], that building is practically the same as it was then, except they stuccoed the outside and painted it. It was this soft, red brick that they used. You dig the stucco off and you will see it, it is still there.

ES: Oh, it was just like the tabernacle and the Curry home.

Ralph: And you would go on up to the corner and there the Ashley Co-op was and that was the old sandstone brick building, just like it was then, not any part of the building was built after 1900, so it has been in operation eighty-four years.

First, we painted it. It is soft and the weather would just keep eating it away. So, to try to save it, we painted it, and then, the paint wouldn't hold, so then we covered it with aluminum, not because we wanted to, but we either had to that or something else to save it. The brick was just deteriorated. Except for the outside that building is just like it was before.

Across on the other side, where the First Security Bank is, the Uintah State Bank was there. It looked a lot like the First Security Bank does now. A little north of there was the Continental Wagon and Machine Company. They sold wagons and buggies and farm machinery.

ES: North of Penney's?

Ralph: No, north of the First Security Bank.

ES: Oh, where Newton Brothers came in [54 North Vernal Avenue]?

Ralph: Yes. It was first Consolidated Wagon and Machine Company. Then when they changed hands, why, Newtons bought the land and the building, too, and established Newton Brothers' business. They made harnesses and saddles and boots. That was a real prosperous business. Just as a guess, I'd say that they had about thirty employees there in Newton Brothers. The real brains of that company was the blind man. Bill Newton was blind. He was the real brains of the bunch. Of course, his brother worked there, too, but Bill, he was a real sharp person.

ES: He wrote some poems. I have a book of poems he wrote.

Ralph: Then, where the Bank of Vernal is, that was the Coltharp Building. They had a mercantile store there. The corner building there was used by the Bank of Vernal, rented to the Bank of Vernal by the Coltharps.

The Coltharp people were real money people in those days and they were not LDS, they were Catholic. They had a mercantile store there, and they are the ones that hired N.J. Meagher. They were big stockholders in the Bank of Vernal. They hired N.J. Meagher to come in that bank. That bank, then, was not built of this native brick. I can remember, they talk about the

brick being shipped in to build that Bank of Vernal. I remember them building that bank. I don't remember what year it was.

ES: 1916.

Ralph: 1916, that's when. I know it was before 1919, because the Second Ward Chapel was built in 1919. 1916 is when it was built. I would walk past there every day going to Central school, and I would see them working on that building.

ES: You must have seen the packages that the brick came in?

Ralph: Yes. The packages were, oh, about sixteen inches square or something like that. They were bound up in little packages, they weren't solid wood, but it was wood and tin, bound together, so you could see them. That's the first fired brick I think that we had in Vernal. It was about then, that was it.

ES: And then was the bakery there?

Ralph: The bakery was right on down the road south, about half a block, then there were some little board-front stores. Well, before you got to the board-front stores, the big building continued on down, and the Calder's Confectionery was in that building. Remember where the old beer parlor was there? That's where Calder's Confectionery was at one time. Pontha Calder ran that confectionery.

ES: Was that the beer parlor, was that the Shamrock? Where was the Shamrock?

Ralph: That was it. Then Mr. Adams had a store, a little frame building, lumber front.

ES: That was George Adams?

Ralph: George Adams.

ES: What did he sell?

Ralph: It was a grocery store and a general merchandise store. It wasn't a very big one, but he had one there, and also Mr. Bullock had one down there, and Mrs. Martin. You know the old Martin house, right down here [approximately 155 North Vernal Avenue]? That was built when I was just a young kid. She had a little ladies' clothing and hat store.

ES: She must have done quite well for she left quite a big house.

Ralph: Well, her husband was a doctor and he was a good doctor. He built that house before he died. He had four sons, no daughters, and the sons were all young. I think the oldest was about fourteen or fifteen years old when he died. There were just young kids. Mrs. Martin raised those kids and sent them to school. She did real well with them. She had an awful struggle, but she

never did sell that house. She had quite a time to make things pay, but she never did sell the home until... Well, I don't know, I think they still own it. Doesn't Phillip own it?

ES: I know Rosie Hein lives in it, Betty Hein's daughter. She is married and I can't remember her married name.

Ralph: I saw Phillip about a month ago. He's got emphysema and he doesn't work anymore. I'm going to ask him if they still own that. I have an idea that the Martin boys still own that, or Phillip does. But anyway, that was one of the landmarks back then, that house.

Dr. Christie had a home right north of the Martin home. Right where Ralph Preece's insurance company is now, and that home, Dr. Christie's home, was still in use. All he did was just move it west about a hundred feet. It is still standing there. That's one of the old landmarks, it's still there.

Another landmark that is still there is where Glenn Lee's home is now [271 North Vernal Avenue]. That house is over one hundred years old.

Of course, the Vernal Mill was another landmark. It was on Fourth North and one block west, on Fourth North. It was a big, three-story building.

ES: Did you ever see the Swains Brick kilns down there when they used to have the kilns?

Ralph: Yeah. You know where they meet to go on the Hatch River Expeditions [221 North 400 East]? Well, just north of there, out in that pasture, is where they fired the brick. They fired the brick right there. They made every brick in that tabernacle. Every one of them. And they helped to put most of them up. Manwarings helped on that building and some of the others. It seems like we had a lot of good workmen during those early days, a lot of bricklayers and a lot of carpenters, a lot of stone masons.

ES: Tell me, can you remember? You say the Swains made the brick and the Manwarings put it up. Who else worked, like the lumber people?

Ralph: Well, Will Cook's father, his name was Will, and do you remember George Johnstun? George Johnstun's father was a lumber man. My dad was a lumber man. He went into the lumber business before he went into the sheep and banking business.

ES: Who as George Johnstun's father?

Ralph: Alma Johnstun.

ES: Alma. So they worked on it.

Ralph: They worked on it.

ES: Who put the windows in, would you think?

Ralph: Those windows were shipped from Salt Lake by team and wagon. I can't give you the



name of the carpenter right now that did it, but I would just guess that it was the Cooks and the Johnstuns that did it. You see, the boys were old enough to help on that tabernacle at that time, and I think that they did it. They were all good carpenters.

There were some other carpenters here, too. Their names, I don't recall. Hutchins was one of them. Frank Smith was one, and there were a lot of good carpenters here. You notice, maybe you don't anymore, but in 1905, you see there was a building boom here then. A lot of these schoolhouses have the date on them, 1905. There were a lot of people here that were in the building business then, real expert at it. Oh, Fowler and Gardiner were both masons. Dick Fowler was a mason and Gardiners, Manwarings and Swains, their whole family, not just one man, there were several in the family.

ES: We were going on down toward school. You got down to about the middle of the block on South Vernal Avenue there. Seems like I read in history where there was a boarding house or a hotel on First South and...

Ralph: First East. Oh, it isn't First East, but east there on the corner. Yes, that was Hotel Vernal.

ES: Who ran that?

Ralph: Well, Mrs. Long ran it for a while, but somebody ran it before she did. I don't remember who it was before Mrs. Long.

ES: Okay, now we skipped where Colliers had their furniture store. What was in there when you went to school? When you walked by there? Seems like it was a garage or something.

Ralph: Yes. That was the Vernal Auto up in there for a long time. Mr. Barnes, Mr. Barney Thomas. Oh, George Slaugh built it and Frank Slaugh, his son, run it for a little while, and then they sold it to Barnes and Thomas and they run it for quite a long time. Also, out on that corner where the Cobble Rock Service Station was [southeast corner of Main Street and Vernal Avenue], there was a building that the Uintah State Bank was in before they built the building where the First Security Bank is now. They were in that, I don't know, four or five years.

ES: Was that along there where the office supply is now?

Ralph: Right there. Exactly there.

ES: So, that would have been about 1912 on for a while?

Ralph: There somewhere.

ES: Then, was the Curry home being built then?

Ralph: The Curry home was already built [189 South Vernal Avenue]. Now in between there, that space, Mr. Woodard had a furniture store. Right where that cleaning establishment is now. It was a brick building, native brick. He had a furniture store there for a long time.

ES: Is that where Bud's Sportsman's lounge is now [65 South Vernal Avenue]?

Ralph: No, he didn't build down that far.

ES: That's where the Fashion Cleaners are now [43 South Vernal Avenue]?

Ralph: The Fashion Cleaners, right in there.

ES: Then, let's see, I guess that hotel was there where Bud's is.

Ralph: Yeah.

ES: Then Imperial Hall was built in 1911.

Ralph: And it was across the corner [southeast corner of Vernal Avenue and First South]. It was built by Andrew [King] and Clarence Showalter. It operated for a long time as a private concern. I thought they did real well. They used it for a skating rink, and they used it for a theater. They used to have people from Salt Lake come out in the summer time and put on shows and theaters. Ralph Clonager (?), I guess you are too young to have heard about him, but he was a leading man. He came out every summer and stayed for a week and put on a show every night, a different show.

I thought that was a wonderful place. The floor had a spring to it. It was lots easier than a solid floor. It was on a spring. They used it for basketball games, and they used it for all the dances, all the big dances that the school had were held there, public dances, it was a real amusement center for the whole town. That was there on that corner when I was young.

The old Workman Hall, that was a half mile west of there, was just about done for by the time I was old enough to participate in anything like that. I can remember being there. I have been to basketball games there. I remember about it.

The Orpheus was what the Imperial Hall was called when they built it, the Orpheus Hall. It had all the business when I was growing up.

ES: I believe Hazel Sowards told me that in about 1926 or 1927, that while they were building the new school over there south of the old Academy, that they had to go over to Jake's Hall and take their gym classes.

Ralph: Yes. They did. They did have gym classes in there. In the early days that [building] was a real social tribute to the people. They had some local talent theaters in there. They had all the dances there and it was run quite strictly. They wouldn't put up with very much rowdiness in that building.

ES: You are talking about Jake's Hall?

Ralph: Both of them were that way. Neither one of them, these weren't rough houses, they were real elite, well-kept dance halls.

ES: That's good. So, when you went to Central, the old school that was torn down, on the north side of the block, when you went to school, that's where you first went, wasn't it?

Ralph: Yes, the old Uintah Academy.

ES: I'm talking about Central.

Ralph: Oh, Central, yes, it was the one north.

ES: Then the other one was still standing?

Ralph: It was still standing.

ES: Until 1941 or so, they said. About 1941 when they built the new school, they tore it down.

Ralph: Yes, then there was another old school, just a little bit south of the new building. It was built out of native brick, too.

ES: That was the one that was two rooms at first, then they added one on the back. They said they added one on the back, a third room on the back.

Ralph: I don't know when that was built, but it was the old building when I started school. They used to always call it "the old building."

ES: Now, what about the "Green Bunk"? I don't know where it was or what it was about. Erma Beck Taylor told me that there was a little building. When they got kind of crowded at one time, they had a little building out in back and it was green, so they called it the Green Bunk.

Ralph: Yeah. It was built out of lumber. First they had it built there, I think, to store supplies and the stools and things while they built the schoolhouse, and when they got through building the schoolhouse, they fixed it up and used it for the school building. I think they used it for five or six years.

ES: Is that right? Then someone said that later on they built a building on the back. I have seen it. It had a tall smokestack, and I think it had the furnace and someone said that it was used for a cannery. It had the restrooms, the modern restrooms.

Ralph: Yeah, it did. That was built right onto the old Central School.

ES: Okay, then, I need to ask, do you remember anything, your dad's opinion or him saying anything, telling you about the Indian situation. How did people get along with the Indians in the early days?

Ralph: Well, my family got along with them very well. We run sheep on their ground, and we

didn't know that it was their ground, and we run probably in the winter time, and, of course, the Indians weren't using it. They didn't have anything to put on it. We just used it.

Then my dad was a real good friend of Billy Preece. And Billy Preece worked over there in Whiterocks and Myton. He helped them build the Indian water canal over here. He knew a lot of Indians real well and he got along exceptionally well with them. With his help, why, Dad got along real well with the Indians. Like, the Indians that had money to bank, nearly all of them banked in the Uintah State Bank. Of course, most of them didn't really bank, and don't yet, but those that did bank...

Then another thing the Indians were friends with Dad for, because Dad was president of the bank and Mr. Curry, he managed the bank, was brother to the "Squaw-man" Curry. His brother married an Indian girl in Ouray and he lived in Ouray, too. In fact, Mr. Curry had two brothers. Orin is the one that married the Indian girl and Matt run the store over there. So, in that connection, well, Dad was pretty well-known to the Indians, so we always got along really well with them. We didn't have any close connections, except with grazing and they traded at our mill. They would come over to the Vernal Mill. We had a big campground there, so they would always camp there. They would come over once a year and get all the flour they could afford to buy and haul it back. It would last them all winter. So, they dealt in that respect, too.

ES: What kind of containers did they carry their flour in?

Ralph: Cotton flour bags.

ES: Just the sacks?

Ralph: A regular cotton flour bag.

ES: What year did your dad first come to Vernal? I've forgotten.

Ralph: 1889. He came out and bought that place down there, a mile north of town. Then he went back to Salt Lake and he and Mother were married and came back to Vernal in 1890, and they never did leave.

ES: Okay, and you said you were born in 1905.

Ralph: Yeah, in that house.

ES: What year did you say that he bought this land? Was it when he first came, in 1889?

Ralph: 1889. He bought it from Mrs. Fox's grandfather, but I can't remember his name. He also owned this clear from the creek up to the center of town. He owned this whole thing through here.

ES: Your dad?

Ralph: No. The man that had the land before my dad. And the Moore people, their relatives, they

owned the place where Edgar Calder and his boy live. They owned all this land back here, all that.

ES: You were telling me about the water a while ago. Where did you get the water for the land right up here, out of the creek?

Ralph: Dad got water for his farm out of the creek. That's why he bought it. He could see that he could get the water out of the creek, early, easy, and that's what he was looking for. But his place, here, comes out of Ashley Central Canal, and that canal was started just about the time that Dad came here, or a year or two before. Alma Johnstun, George Johnstun's father, plowed a furrow from the head of Ashley Creek up there, where all the works are, where all the canals come from. He plowed a furrow right down to Fifth West and Main Street. That was right across his ground, right where George lived. He plowed that furrow right through there and made a canal. Just a year or two later, why, they formed the canal company and enlarged it. A lot of that original canal follows those old plow furrows that he made.

ES: Let's see, did you travel around, or did your dad travel around, the Basin very much in those days?

Ralph: Oh, yes. Thinking back now, it's remarkable to me how he knew every little corner of this darn Basin. He had to go either on horseback or "whitetop," or buckboard, but he knew it all. He ran for county commissioner several times. I think that every person that lived in Tridell knew my dad.

ES: So, he got up into there even? It's amazing to me how they got around just on horses!

Ralph: I don't know how he had time to do all he did and know all the places around. He knew the Gilsonite mine. He knew the Book Cliffs. He knew it all. I don't think there is anyplace that I have been that my dad hasn't been, long before I was there.

ES: Did he ever take you with him at all when you were a little boy?

Ralph: Yes.

ES: Where did you go?

Ralph: I was the last of the boys, and the other boys were too big to go with Dad anymore, and he used to take me a lot.

ES: Around to different places?

Ralph: He told me, oh, a lot of things as we were riding along that he never told the rest of them. Dad wasn't very much of a hand to talk very long at a time, but he would say a little now and then, and then he would change the subject and say something else. But to give a public speech, he never did have to do that.

You know when you go into a home there's always one or two people, the voice of the whole crowd? He was never that way. He was always quiet and retiring. He would talk, but he didn't want to ever break in on somebody else's conversation. So, when we were alone, and I went to the mountain with him, I guess, hundreds of times, and the other kids may have done it, but I was the last one, he told me things that I don't think he ever did tell the rest of the family.

ES: Were there any lands that he would say, "Well, we can't go on these lands because they belong to the Indians." Was there any restriction on where you could go?

Ralph: When Dad was here, well, there was no restriction. That was the Indian Reservation all right, but nobody knew where it was. You could go anyplace you wanted to. It was under the forest up here. There were no forest allotments until 1905, the year I was born, and you could go anyplace on that forest that you wanted to.

Of course, there wasn't any BLM allotments until 1942, I think, was when they made the allotments. They started to do it in 1936, but I think it was 1942 before they ever got the allotments made, so you could go anyplace that you wanted to go. In fact, Diamond Mountain, a lot of that was private property, but it wasn't fenced. You couldn't tell where the private was, where Indian country was. You could go anywhere that you wanted to.

ES: So, people just traveled about anywhere, then?

Ralph: Yes.

ES: When someone made a reference to the Indian Reservation, what lands did you think they were talking about?

Ralph: To me it meant right around the Fort Duchesne area. I knew that was Indian land. I knew that there was some land clear around it, but I didn't have any conception of the immensity of that Indian land. I just thought that it was a little strip of land around Fort Duchesne. I didn't have any idea what it was.

ES: Did you, at that time, think of Whiterocks being Indian territory?

Ralph: Yes, I knew that was because, I told you a while ago, Billy Preece worked up there, and he worked for the Indians, so, I knew that up there someplace was Indian land. But I knew it wasn't all Indian land because there were some whites' homes scattered through there, too. I didn't know where the boundaries were. In fact, I can go up there now and I can't tell you exactly where the boundaries are. I knew that they had land up there, but I didn't have any idea how much they controlled and the Indians didn't try to keep you off. They let you go anywhere that you wanted.

ES: Are you aware that the Indian people are now trying to claim that they own more land than they do?

Ralph: I am very well aware of that. About, oh, when I first became active in the sheep business,

I got a letter from the Department of Interior saying that the Indian Department had filed claim for all the land out there that was allotted to us for sheep allotments.

When you read the history of those Indian people, there is no way to correct it now, you can't do it, but if those people were still alive that they took that land from, you can't help but say that land really belonged to the Indians. That Meeker Massacre, the more I read of it, the more that I talk to those old Indians that remember it, the more I think that that was a cooked up deal to steal the Indians' land.

You see, they owned, just this side of Denver, oh, maybe twenty miles this side of Denver, they owned all of that land, clear to the Utah line. There was enough land there for forty-five hundred acres for every man, woman and child, the choicest land, I think it is the choicest land in the world, even now. The Colorado Rockies are magnificent and they were wealthy with gold and silver. That's really what brought on the Meeker Massacre, I believe. I don't think it was nearly as severe an incident as those people in Colorado made it appear, so they could drive the Indians off of that land and take their gold and silver.

ES: And use the land.

Ralph: Of course, those Indians are gone, and you can't make them feel any better and these young Indians don't know anything about it, so I don't know what should be done about it, but I really feel like the white man stole that land. I think that it was a "put-up" job to get rid of the Indians to get that land.

ES: There in Colorado, huh? So, then they just pushed them over here in a smaller area.

Ralph: Yes. A lot of those Indians still feel like that, too. I bet you that some of them have told Glade [Sowards] that they feel like that, that that land was stolen from them.

Well, they did let a little bunch of those Indians stay over there. They are known as the Northern Ute Indians, that's over around Antonio. That's part of these same Indians that were in it. Through the settlement somehow, those Indians were allowed to stay. But really, they owned that whole thing. It was given to them by a treaty. One Indian said, "The only truth that the white man ever told the Indian is when he told me he was going to take the land." That's the only promise they ever made that they kept! That's really about the way it turned out.

ES: Do you have some friends that live over on the reservation now?

Ralph: Yeah, I have some real good Indian friends.

ES: Who are some of them?

Ralph: Well, there's the Navanicks, the Cesspooches, the LaRoses.

ES: Did you know the Wopsocks and Serawops, Cuches?

Ralph: Yes, I knew them. The Cuches and LaRoses are kind of a favored group of Indians, much more cultured and much more intelligent than some. They are a lot better human beings than

their normal Indian brothers.

ES: Did you know the Wyaskets?

Ralph: Yeah, they are, too. One of the reasons is they are not full-blood Indian. Mrs. LaRose told me that they came down, the LaRoses and Harrises, came from up there in Idaho, and they had French blood in them. That's where they got the name LaRose. A lot of the Harrises are blue-eyed. They are a different people than a lot of the Indians over there.

Then the Cesspooches have some Spanish, they are crossed with Spanish, and the Navanicks, you can see it in them, they have got Chinese blood in them. They are real pretty girls.

ES: Do you think they were related to the Wongs?

Ralph: Yeah, I know they are. They know it, too. Their grandmother I knew quite well. She died about ten years ago. She was married to Wong Cesspooch. When they would get mad at each other, she would accuse him of being a Mexican and he would accuse her of being a Chinaman! But that mixture, well, you see, half-breeds are more industrious and forward and intelligent than the full-blooded Ute. You can still see it in the Harrises and the LaRoses and the Navanicks, they are different than some of those Utes over there.

ES: They are kind of the leaders, aren't they?

Ralph: Yes, and you can see some of those Utes over there that you can identify that have Negro blood in them.

ES: They are quite a mixed group, aren't they?

Ralph: They are quite mixed up.

ES: What do you think of the Bureau of Indian Affairs?

Ralph: Well, I think they have got a real tough job, and sometimes I think they are more interested in perpetuating their own jobs than they are in really helping the Indians. It is a tough job! They tried to do without that Indian Department, but they can't do it. They are just not intelligent enough to cope with this complicated society that we have got now. They just can't do it. That is, all of them can't, but a few of them can. A few of them. If they moved away from that reservation and lived somewhere else, they can do anything the white man can. But when they live on that reservation, their income is so small. Another thing, I guess Glade's told you, if one Indian excels or a group of Indians, they'll beat him up! He dare not excel.

ES: They pull them down, don't they?

Ralph: Yes. They pull them right back down.



ES: Yes, I have seen that happen.

Ralph: The Indian Department has got a big job to do to help those Indians. It seems like a slow job. They have been at it for a hundred years. Gosh! It looks like they could do something in that length of time.

ES: Do you think that the Indians have received a fair deal from the government?

Ralph: I think that they have been mistreated on every hand. They haven't got a fair deal from the Indian Department. They haven't got a fair deal from the white businessmen. They have really been mistreated.

ES: I remember when they first got their oil money in the fifties. They used to go to town and the car dealers would sell them big Cadillacs and Buicks, and all those big cars. And they would get drunk and go home and wreck them on the way. Do you remember? Then they would go buy another one, you know, when they got their allotment checks. I remember that.

Ralph: Yeah, they did.

ES: Someone sold them washing machines and things and they didn't have electricity, do you remember that?

Ralph: Yeah. I don't know. It's easy to sit on the outside and say what's wrong with it, but when you get into the middle of it and have to do the job yourself, I know they have got a real difficult job. But, I'm not thoroughly convinced that they couldn't do a better job than they have done.

ES: What do you think that the policy should be toward the Indians with the government? What would you think the government should do for them or shouldn't do for them?

Ralph: I think that they should give them all the freedom that they possibly can, but don't let them degenerate and kill themselves. I think that they should have more of a say in the policy that is used. And that's difficult, too, because there's a lot of those Indians that can't communicate, they still can't communicate.

ES: Some of them seem not to trust. If you try to do something for them, or work with them, they don't seem to trust you very much.

Ralph: It takes a long time to ever get any trust out of those people. I worked for a year before many of them would tell me the time of day. I have had a few good friends, right off from the start, a few of them. This ole Henry Cesspooch, I could rely upon him anytime, and pretty soon it got so those younger kids would trust me, a few of those. Then you can branch out and start to do some good. But when you first go over there, you just as well stay home. You just can't do anything. Unless you have got some help there, they won't trust you. And you can see why.

ES: Yes. Did you ever hear any stories about Indians and whiskey?

Ralph: Oh, there's a lot of stories about Indians and whiskey. I think more Indians die from whiskey than any other one cause. Whiskey and its related causes, car accidents, pneumonia, poverty, I think it causes more death than anything in an Indian's life. It seems like they are all susceptible to it.

ES: They can't seem to take it.

Ralph: They can't drink a little bit and leave it alone, they just can't do it. It's either none or else all the way.

ES: Can you tell me any of the old stories that you heard about, maybe that your Dad had told you about somebody?

Ralph: Well, he knew so many people. Well, I don't hardly know how to answer that question. He told me all about S.R. Bennion. When I was a young kid, Taft was running for president, but to my way of thinking, S.R. Bennion was a lot greater man than Taft.

ES: Your dad really liked Sam Bennion, huh?

Ralph: He was just "sit right next to God"! S.R. Bennion, you know. I've grown up with that. I have that same feeling. If S.R. Bennion says it, it's true! If anybody could do it, S.R. Bennion could do it! He was my dad's idol and has more or less been my idol.

Dad told me that S.R. Bennion taught him to keep books, and I went through some of the books that Dad kept, I guess eighty years ago, and, my gosh, they are real intelligent. They are not the way that I keep them today. I'll tell you, you can understand how much money he made and where he made it, and what he did with it. With these kinds of books that you've got today, you can't do that. Some of them, you can't do that.

ES: Do you still have some of those? Where are they?

Ralph: Yeah, there's some out there. I did happen to end up with that. Well, the way I ended up with it, I had a big box built like a trunk, and when they moved Dad's stuff, everything that nobody wanted, they put in that box. Everybody shuffled through that box, everybody took everything that they wanted, took all of Mother's painted china and all of her silver, all of her pictures, and all of her nice sheets and pillowcases. Everything like that disappeared. But nobody wanted that stuff in that box. It was there and that's how I have it. That mahogany desk that he had, I'd've given anything for that desk. I didn't get anything like that.

ES: Who got the desk?

Ralph: Well, it was in the home. The home belonged to Mother and Ray was the administrator for Mother's estate. Tess gave that mahogany desk to Mrs. Alice Kidd, and that's where it went. I didn't know it until more than four or five years after, but that's where it went. That old hall thing that sat right there as you go in, I don't know where that went. Those brass beds that you'd give a

pretty penny to have one of those, I don't know where they went. But that box, nobody wanted.

ES: So you have that.

Ralph: That's right.

ES: What are going to do with it?

Ralph: Oh, I'll probably give it to Bill or somebody.

ES: If he doesn't have a place for it, maybe we could save some things, just for the records, down in my room.

Ralph: That would be a good record for the library, all right.

ES: Well, if you ever look through it and think there's a couple of things we could use or whatever, that Bill wouldn't want, I wouldn't want to take anything he wants, but sometimes you don't have room for saving all those things.

Ralph: Well, he isn't going to live forever either. Maybe it would be the best thing to take it down there. Marsale has some of the old account books that her dad had. Gosh, are they interesting! To see the people that he sold to, and they would charge as little as twenty-five cents!

ES: And he had a meat market, right?

Ralph: Yes.

ES: Oh, that would be fun to have that. That would be really nice. That's what I would like to do, is to see if I could round up some of those books, you know, just have them there. People like to come and see their grandfather's name or something, you know. Well, that's interesting.

Ralph: Well, those old books of the Uintah State Bank, they would have been real interesting. But Mr. Cheney made Henry Schaefermeyer take those down to the dump and burn them.

ES: Is that right? That's too bad!

Ralph: Those pictures that used to hang on the wall, he was told to destroy those, but he hunted up the people that he thought would want them and gave me my dad's picture. And he gave me William H. Smart's picture, and he gave me Ed Samuel's picture. Everybody that he could think of that would take a picture, he gave it to them.

ES: Now where do you have them?

Ralph: At my office in the Co-op. I have S.R. Bennion's picture up there, too. He gave that to Allen Bennion. He didn't want it, so he gave it to me, so I have that.

ES: Well, that's interesting. You know, when you look back, it doesn't seem very long ago. Time flies, doesn't it?

Ralph: It sure does! You know, we are putting shingles on this house. It was built in 1929. This is the third time we have put shingles on it. Ward White built it. Ward White was another of the good carpenters. I didn't think of him when I told you about the carpenters. Ward White came in as a carpenter when they built Fort Duchesne and he stayed. He never went back again. He stayed right here in Vernal. He built that house, the old White house, he built that.

ES: Where Schwobes live?

Ralph: Yes. Oh, there's a lot of houses around there that Ward White built. And when he built them, they stand a long time.

ES: I think Cook built Grandma and Grandpa's house, didn't he?

Ralph: Yes, I think so. I think Will Cook did. And John Siddoway built the old Uintah State Bank Building. He built the Vernal Drug. He built all the buildings in there.

ES: Now, someone said that William Smart owned the home where your father lived.

Ralph: Yeah, he did. He had it built. I think the Cooks built it. William H. Smart had it built. William H. Smart was another entrepreneur. He came into Vernal with a lot of money. He was called to Vernal to be president of the [LDS] stake. He took S.R. Bennion's place as president of the stake. He was the first president of the Uintah State Bank. He had two herds of sheep. He was a wealthy man. He was still wealthy when he lived in Vernal.

They called him from Heber to Vernal and they called him from Vernal back to Roosevelt as head of the Duchesne Stake, and when he was in Duchesne, he lost his money. He was always going to have water on all that land that was around Roosevelt. Finally, they did get the water down to Ouray, and all through there, and he worked his life out to get that water down there.

ES: How did he get around the Indian situation?

Ralph: He did real well with the Indians. He helped them to get what they wanted and they gave him a right-of-way to build his canal.

ES: So he helped them and they helped him.

Ralph: He got along real well with them. He was an outstanding person. People don't appreciate him. He was a real outstanding person. He lost his wealth over there in Duchesne trying to make that place productive. It is now, but it didn't prove out quick enough to do him any good.

ES: Tell me all of your brothers and sisters. Your mother's name was Dunster, right? Emily Dunster?

Ralph: Emily Jane Dunster, and Dad's was William Henry. The first son was named William Wallace, and I was the last son. I was named Henry Ralph, so it took a long time before he used both of his names. I never did like the name Henry. I still don't like it! So when I was a little boy, I went by Ralph.

Mary was a daughter and she was the firstborn. She lived in California. Ever since you have lived here, she has lived in California. She married John R. Taylor. He was the son of Apostle Taylor who resigned his apostleship. He was a polygamist. He resigned his apostleship. That's who Mary married.

Wallace was the second. He was in the sheep business all of his life. That was the only thing he ever did. He was in the sheep business.

John was next, then Faye, Fanny was her name. She was named after my father's mother. His mother was named Fanny Wilkerson Siddoway.

Then they had a son, Owen, who died when he was only eight years old. He had heart trouble. I think he never was really well. Of course, I just know from what they told me. He was never really well. He died when he was eight years old. Then there was Ray, Faye, Mable, Lorna. There were nine of us all together. There were five boys, counting the one that died, and four girls.

I think you know this, but I'll tell you anyway. He [my father] was a man who was real rounded out. He appreciated religion. He was a religious man. He was a civic leader. He was a school leader. He was president of the school board, oh, I don't know, twelve, fifteen, or twenty years, a lot of these schoolhouses that we talked about were built when he was president. He was a business leader. He was president on the board of directors of at least ten of these little companies around here.

ES: Now, what education did he have?

Ralph: He went to the third grade. He never went to school very much, but he was a lot better educated than most people.

ES: That's what I was thinking. He seems to be a really intelligent man. He must have always been aware of life and have been willing to learn or something.

Ralph: He was a good reader. He was a good penman. He spelled like I do; he didn't do a lot of writing, but he wrote really well when he wrote. He was a really civic-minded person. Lots of times he had opportunity that he could have taken advantage of land purchases. He could have made a lot of profit on it, a healthy sum to do it, but I think he got more real enjoyment out of seeing people grow, and grow with him, than he did hoarding money.

ES: He tried to help people get a start.

Ralph: He always helped. You will find that he was really helpful to the poor people. Poor people that couldn't get any help anywhere else, they would get help from "Uncle Will," and he always liked to help people. He would have been a much richer man than he was if he had just wanted to prosper himself and his family. He could have done a lot better job of that than he did, but he

wanted to see other people prosper, too, and he did see them prosper.

He told me he could have bought all of Diamond Mountain for twenty-five cents an acre. But he didn't do it. All of his friends came around him, and bought pieces. They would buy where the water was and then they controlled all the rest of it. That's the way they picked up that land. But he wasn't particularly anxious to build up a big empire for himself. However, he did have a lot of land, a lot of good land. You go on Diamond Mountain, even now. Well, I guess he did own as much as anybody on Diamond Mountain, but he had the best land. He didn't have the poorest land that you had to scratch to make anything out of, he had the best land. The same with his farm down here in the valley.

ES: He knew what to pick out.

Ralph: Yes, he just had the best of it, but he didn't particularly care about having all of it. What he had, he wanted it to be good. He was that way in his life. Whenever he bought anything, he bought it good. One thing he didn't buy good was the first automobile he bought, an old Model T. It wasn't old. It was a brand new Model T Ford. He couldn't start the dang thing. He had an awful time starting it. He had that about six months and then he sold it and bought a Buick. There's been a Buick in our family ever since.

ES: Kind of a tradition?

Ralph: He bought a Buick in 1916 and there's been a Buick in our family ever since. So, that's really the kind of person that he was. He was a real temperate man. He had a temper, all right, boy, his temper could come up in a hurry, but all my life he never did strike me. Never. He never did "lick" me. Sometimes he talked pretty strong.

ES: You would probably rather have had him lick you than talk to you sometimes, huh?

Ralph: He never did hit one of us. I never did see him hit one of us.

ES: Well, that's wonderful. I never knew your dad. I just barely knew your mother in her last few years. But it seemed like she had quite a love for your dad. Did they really get along well?

Ralph: Yeah, they did. I think that was the only man that she had any attraction to at all. They were always together. If they ever went anyplace, they always went together. If Dad wasn't working, he was home. He didn't fool around the way a lot of men do. He didn't play cards. I have seen him play cards at home, but he never went away from home and played cards.

ES: In the old days, they used to play bridge and games at home.

Ralph: He played bridge and checkers and crokinole. They used to do that and go to other people's houses. We would go to the Witbecks' or the Jensens' or the Carters' and Davises' or the McNeil home. The families would get together and have dinner and play those games. Dad was not really a socialite in his life. He was more in the background, but he was interested in everything that I knew anything about. He wasn't a mechanic, but he could fix a car.

ES: He must have been a genius in a way, interested in everything like that. You said Davises, that would have been John Davis?

Ralph: John N. Davis.

ES: And Charlie Neal?

Ralph: Charlie Carter.

ES: Oh, it was McNeils, who was the McNeil family?

Ralph: Thomas McNeil, Leland's grandfather. Will Witbeck was Pearl Snyder's stepfather. They lived in that house where Pearl lives now [292 West 100 North].

ES: I've got to go talk to her and get some more history from her. These things are really interesting and precious. What has interested me is to read these histories and someone will tell what they thought about something during a certain period. I can read several histories and put them together and I can get a visual picture of how things were at certain times.

I guess when you were young the courthouse had been built and all that.

Ralph: Yes, the old courthouse had been built when I was young. I don't remember when they built it.

ES: In the early 1900s I believe.

Ralph: No wonder I don't remember it, it was built before I was born! [Ed. note: It was built in 1900.]

Dad was interested in people. He was a Mormon and a good Mormon, but he was interested in and had a lot of friends that were not Mormons. You mentioned Charlie Neal. The Neal family was real good friends of Dad's. The Thorne family were good friends of Dad's. And Mont McCoy was Dad's best friend. He was real close to a lot of people who were not Mormons, but I don't know, he just had the interest of all... He didn't become bound by a little clique the way so many of us do. He could talk to anybody on anything at any time, if there were just one or two of them, but to get up in a public meeting, he didn't enjoy that a bit. A man on the street, you couldn't hardly find a man on the street that he didn't know and know well. He didn't just know their name, he knew something about them.

ES: Grandpa [Harmon S. Sowards] was like that. If he didn't know someone, he would always ask them who they were, and by the time he left them, he knew who they were and what they did and he found out all about them.

I had another thought, do you remember anything about World War I.

Ralph: Yeah, I do.

ES: What do you remember, any interesting things?

Ralph: Well, they took a lot of boys from Vernal. Of course, we all had an extreme hatred for Germans, whether they lived in Germany or whether they lived here. You hated Germans because they started the war. Kaiser Wilhelm was a real crooked individual, a mean person, and we all hated Kaiser Wilhelm for what he had done. But it did disrupt the farming and sheep industry here because it took so many of the boys that age. Talking about Witbecks, two of their boys who were active in the sheep business, two of them went into the Army and they were both killed in France. That's why it [American Legion] was called Witbeck Post #11. Those two boys.

ES: Were they buried over in Flanders Field or were they brought back to Vernal?

Ralph: They were brought back. Their bodies were brought back to Vernal a long time after that. That was a real tragedy, especially for this little group I was telling you about, they were so close.

One of the sheepherders that had herded for Dad for a long time, George Peters, Eva Hatch's oldest brother, he was killed over there. Vern McCarrell, who worked in Ashtons for so long, he was shot over there. It didn't kill him, but he got shot over there.

ES: What about Harold Banks? I guess he was in the Second World War. Did he ever go in the war? How did he lose his hand?

Ralph: He was never in the war. He lost his hand hunting sage hens. He was crawling through the fence and I think the boy he crawled through the fence with, the gun went off and shot Harold's hand off. Now, I may be confused on that, because John Carter and a Woods boy were hunting pheasants and they crawled through the fence, and the Woods boy's gun went off and shot John in the face. He had plastic surgery, but he carried that all of his life. I don't think Harold Banks was ever in any war. He lost his hand when he was just a young kid in high school.

ES: Do you remember the day World War I was over?

Ralph: Yes. They had a flagpole in the center of town, and they put a dummy on it and called it Kaiser Wilhelm, and the Vernal band was there. I wasn't in it at that time, I was too young, but a lot of the men shot guns and they really made a lot of noise. They shot that poor old Kaiser Wilhelm until his overalls were all filled with straw and they shot him until he finally came down. There were a lot of people there. Harmon Sowards' office was in the Bank of Vernal, up at that window. Some of the people were up there, too. Oh, there were a lot of the people that came to town, just on the spur of the moment. Everything quit!

ES: Where was the flagpole exactly?

Ralph: Right in the center of the [main] intersection.

ES: Then later on they put the Doughboy there?



Ralph: Yes, later they put the Doughboy there.

ES: But there was a flagpole there? I didn't know that. When you went to school, that flagpole was there?

Ralph: I think that flagpole wasn't put there until the war was over.

ES: Who would put the flag up every morning?

Ralph: I don't know. I imagine Henry Millecam. He was the town marshal. I imagine he did, but I don't know. It was just there is all I remember.

ES: I think I'd better go. Thanks a lot for visiting with me.

End